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ABSTRACT

In many schools, the assistant principal is poorly trained to assume administrative responsibilities. This paper presents an overview of research that has examined the assistant principal's role. It argues that assistant principals will be expected to take on the new roles of team management and public relations, necessitating their effective use of group communication and shared decision-making skills. Suggested strategies for improving assistant principals' skills include inservice education and leadership academies. One table is included. (Contains 19 references.) (LMI)

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Socialization and Career Orientation of the Assistant Principal

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Abstract

As the new millennium approaches, there are many questions about school administrators and teachers. One of those questions concerns the assistant principal. The relationship between how the assistant principal is oriented to the position and the duties of the post are in doubt. However, this is not a new question about the assistant principal. In most schools, the assistant principal is poorly trained to assume administrative duties. Because of the poor training, the common perception of the assistant principal is as a military type of disciplinarian. This view decides the assistant principal's limited responsibilities for school discipline and bus duty.

A climate of uncertainty has always surrounded this administrative role. There are questions about the methods for socializing the assistant principal. There has also been a question about the career mobility of the assistant principal for the next century. The main question is: what will be the role for the assistant principalship in an educational climate of uncertainty and change? How will assistant principal function in the 21st Century school?

The role and attitudes of public school assistant principal change as he/she becomes involved in the operations of the school. Traditional definitions of a principal's role--setting goals, leadership, decision making, improvement of teaching and learning, instructional management, staff supervisor, and home-school-community relations also are changed by other factors in the school system. These questions about the assistant principal are answered. Suggestions are made to improve the socialization and orientation of the assistant principal.

When the vanguard of reform turned toward the administration of a school, the focus was on the school principal. No one denied that the principal is the leader of the school and will continue in that role. Although the principal's role is recognized, the assistant principal's role is not. The assistant principal's role as a school leader is perceived as less prestigious and less powerful than the principal. Marshall found that the assistant principal's position is still undefined, not an administrator and not helpful to school (Marshall 1993). One problem for enhancing the assistant principal's leadership role is the barriers supporting the traditional sources of the assistant principal duties. The assistant principal's responsibilities often emanate from many competing sources. Those sources include the superintendent of schools, teaching staff, the district central office, and the parents (Binkowski, 1995). However, the main source for the assistant principal's duties is the principal. The literature on the assistant principal makes this more clear. One study reported a reliability of .80 on the duties recounted in twenty-four studies of the assistant principal's duties. The literature identified the tasks and duties of assistant principal that included meting out discipline to assigning locks and lockers (Scoggins 1993). TABLE 1 shows a list of seventeen responsibilities from the study.

Table 1

Duties and Responsibilities of the Assistant Principal

1. Discipline	10. Transportation
2. Attendance	11. Curriculum

3. Student activities	12. Communications
4. Athletics	13. Cafeteria
5. Community agencies	14. School calendar
6. Master schedules	15. Locks
7. Teacher substitutes	16. Lockers
8. Building operations	17. Reports
9. Budget	

Source: Scoggins, A. J. and Bishop, H.L. (1993). A review of the literature regarding the roles and responsibilities of assistant principals. A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (22nd, New Orleans, LA, November 10-12,). Gutman Library ERIC Microfiche Number: ED371436, 56pp.

Traditions and the Assistant Principal

Marshall's study of fifty assistant principals showed that they typically started their days early with meetings with administrators, teachers, or parents. Then, they began to walk the halls to monitor students. Their professional duties often continued after the work day is over. Assistant principals most often cited helping students as the main satisfaction of their positions. Other rewards of the position that they found included solving problems, helping teachers, and setting a stable school atmosphere. Assistant principals appreciated consistent policies, noninterference, support, and good

salaries. In the light of current changes in the schools, the duties of assistant principals are being augmented with more responsibilities as educational needs change (Marshall 1993).

The importance of the assistant principal's role in management and leadership grows from assumptions about the traditional school. One assumption is that the assistant principal helps the principal to manage the school. This assumption involves the basic phases of school management including planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling the activities and the school personnel. However, Marshall and Mitchell pointed out that the assistant principal is limited because of lack of understanding of power in the schools. The assistant principal is also limited by his/her psychological defensiveness about incidents in the schools. The assistant principal holds assumptions about: (1) his/her rights and responsibilities to initiate; (2) his/her acceptable and unacceptable values; (3) his/her pattern of unexpected and sanctionable behavior; and (4) other special conditions of school management predict whether he/she will avoid conflict and risks in school decisions (Marshall & Mitchell 1990).

One structure that limited the role of the assistant principal was the teacher-centered school. The concept of the teacher-centered school and its effects on the principal, the teachers and the students was not completely understood when it was adopted in the public schools. The teacher-centered school became notorious for ignoring the influences of teachers and students. It kept teachers and students passive in educational decisions, and negatively

affected the climate of the school. When the assistant principal's role is viewed from a traditional school perspective, the leadership and management concepts become more distinct. Tradionally, management is where the manager procures, conserves, and distributes. Leadership traditionally is where the leader changes goals, policies, and shares the mission of the school (Hughes 1994). Conceptions of management and leadership become the answer to the question: what can the assistant principal do to help the principal to make all the people in the school work toward the same school objectives.

No one person cannot accomplish all of the duties performed by the assistant principal. Because of this, the selection and socialization process for the assistant principal has become very important. Yet, to date, the selection and development of the assistant principal was very poor. Broussard reports that the selection of the assistant principal should be done with more attention and care. His examination of the job requirements and selection processes of assistant principals showed that most elementary assistant principals were chosen on very subjective criteria of the personal interview. He found that once the basic requirements of the law were met, the applicant simply had to perform well in the interview. In the selection process, little attention was the paid to differences in applicants' educational background or experience (Broussard 1989).

Other research demonstrated that the socialization of the assistant principal also was very poor. Hartzell found that being an assistant principal is even more trying than a teacher's first year. Becoming an administrator is a

personal and professional transition that requires a new definition of one's role as an educator. An assistant principal is important in setting attitudes and standards in the school. Socialization into this new work environment is a major step in making the transition into the position as an administrator. The person who becomes assistant principal must deal with moving from the isolated environment of the classroom to the more open and interactive atmosphere of the administrative office. The assistant principal must deal with the tension between teaching and administering. The assistant principal must learn about the school organization, define the role in the organization, and resolve conflict. The assistant principal also has to learn how to be in a secondary leadership position. Hartzell's research showed that a person can feel overwhelmed and frustrated by the role. The assistant principal must understand these problems of transition. In a socialization process, he/she should talk with other administrators, be able to urge more realistic expectations for the position, and engage in administrator programs (Hartzell & and others 1995). Radich did a case study of the assistant principal's role. She found that the assistant principal was limited by lack of resources, lack of knowledge about problem-solving, the poor selection process, and the consequences of the assistant principal's actions on the school (Radich 1990).

Most educators think the assistant principal should be the subordinateto the principal. They believe that the assistant principal has less experience and less training than the principal. They know that the assistant principal is a step

on career ladder toward the principalship. Few feel that the assistant principal can ever be the equal of the principal given it is a step up to the principalship. The history of the position of assistant principal supports this idea. The end result is that assistant principal is given a multitude of duties by the principal and many of them are trivial. The wide variations in the assistant principal's duties also makes it difficult to treat the position as the equal of the principal. Nevertheless, when the assistant principal's role is examined as part of a team, the role definition changes and a new role emerges.

Team Management and Assistant Principal's Skills

Team management is an important of the restructuring of schools of the future. Both the school principal and the assistant principal will face new responsibilities for the education of students in two different ways. The first way is that the principal and the assistant principal together must apply the concepts of leadership and management to the school (Michel 1993). The second way is that principal and the assistant principal together must be concerned simultaneously about decisions with a team of teachers, staff, parents, and students.

Within team management, it is assistant principal who also has the potential to change the school. If the assistant principal has the proper combination of group skills, he/she can coalesce the school around common goals that school will succeed (Binkowski, 1995). Team management in the 21st century will create a new hero of the assistant principal, deemphasizing the role

of the principal, and making the assistant principal into the leader of a teacher team (Reich 1987).

However, developingthe group skills of the assistant principal has caused increasing anxiety for the school. The assistant principal's goal is to create a sense of school ownership among the teaching staff, the classified staff, the parents, and the students. Notwithstanding, the assistant principal will find that this goal is difficult to achieve. Craig helped to identify some difficulties. He found that the views of the principal and the assistant principal often contain conflicts in how to achieve the stated goals of the school (Craig 1993-1994). In contrast to the these findings, Marcoulides and Heck found that principals and assistant principals have similar views of leadership and will work well together in team management. It also seems that some teachers, staff, parents and students want team management of the school goals, while others do not. The feelings of satisfaction with team management are explained by the balance between how much team management there is and how much is wanted. Some members of these groups do not want to have a part team management and they may be satisfied with how school decisions are made (Marcoulides & Heck 1993).

In team management, the concentration on group skills and social climate directs the assistant principal on another path. He/she becomes more introspective in looking at him/herself and the groups of teachers in the school. Still, not every assistant principal uses group skills well. Some assistant principals lack the stability to make groups work effectively. To make a school

group work together, the assistant principal has to be both flexible and steady. He/she cannot be characterized by emotional ups and downs.

The assistant principal's personality and the teachers' receptiveness are important to developing effective group skills. However, the types of group activities where teachers are involved also are significant. One way to measure the assistant principal's success is to look at three stages in the development of group activities. The three stages are: (1) initiating attempts to use group decision making, (2) using groups to improve the social climate of the school, and (3) using groups to generate new solutions to problems recognized jointly by the assistant principal and the teachers.

The outcomes for the group skills of the assistant principal should always be solutions to mutual problems with the involved parties. For example, if the assistant principal and the teachers appear to have solved a problem with the group, yet remain irritable and aggressive, they are dissatisfied with the solution. The assistant principal has attempted to use group skills, but has not yet been successful. He/she will be successful and effective only when the teachers view the solution as satisfactory and when they remain friendly. The presence of quality solutions to problems and the continued high morale among the teachers are the positive outcomes of the assistant principal's skills.

Relations with the Team and the Community

Strongly related to group skills, but also separate from it, is the assistant principal's skills for personally relating to faculty and students. It is a fact of

organizational behavior that a mutual feeling of understanding between the assistant principal and the teachers helps the school to reach its goals. The assistant principal functions to maximize interactions with teachers and students, while recognizing their differing social backgrounds and expectations. The assistant principal also functions to make the school supportive, contributing to teachers' and students' sense of personal worth. The most effective assistant principal uses interpersonal relations to diffuse control and encourage wider participation in school activities. Through interpersonal relations, he/she is able to create a good working team in the school. Broadly, this team works within the school to meet the school's demands, to achieve its objectives, and to adapt to the community.

Interpersonal relations offer one means at the assistant principal's disposal to make both teachers and students become aware of the problems of the school. The more awareness that students and teachers have of the school's problems, the greater the probability of solving them. Also, the greater the satisfaction will be for the teachers and students. The assistant principal always functions in an environment of interpersonal relations and personal satisfactions as a team member. His/her efficacy in interpersonal relations can be assessed, in part, by whether the school's objectives are achieved.

Over the past four decades, the assistant principal has been pressured to secure maximum participation by the community as a goal of team management. In industry, participation is related to productivity and lowered resistance to

change. The skills of the assistant principal in encouraging participation and involvement of teachers, parents, and community must be well-developed. A skilled assistant principal strives for the balanced involvement among teachers and community that contributes to a productive school environment.

Emerging Patterns for the Professional Role

Specifically, a better understanding of the assistant principal in new and emerging school structures is demanded. The assistant principal's skills can be developed into an effective instrument for improving education through team management and shared decision making. The models of team management and shared decision making also lead to designing appropriate evaluation procedures for the assistant principal. One model to reach this goal was described by Hunter. She proposed several strategies for changing the role of the assistant principal in the following steps. The strategies include to have the assistant principal introduce, implement, and reinforce classroom management skills with the teachers' collaboration. Then, the assistant principal should develop partnerships with teachers. The assistant principal and the teachers should work together to understand and adjust classroom dynamics, and they should establish student responsibility for the school. Both the assistant principal and the teachers also should work toward the use of a systematic approach to discipline throughout the school. They should involve staff to create a positive school climate. Both should use the school support services when indicated. Lastly, both should work to enhance and motivate other teachers (Hunter 1990).

However, the objectives of this career oriented model to change the role of the assistant principal must be understood and agreed upon by all. Research on four schools in Connecticut found that to become good schools, the principal and the assistant principal together had to improve the leadership the schools. Both had to improve their interpersonal skills and promote collaboration. They also had to generate staff development activities that focused on curriculum and the instructional knowledge of the teachers (Binkowski 1995). Hartzell also recommended additional administrative training and job socialization as two tools for enhancing the assistant principal's role (Hartzell 1993). Hosack's prescription to develop the assistant principal's skills in team management is to develop communication skills. She concluded that the lack of communication between the principal and the assistant principal prevented them from working together. Her teaching strategiesfor overcoming this problem included role-play activities, workshops, and communication skill-development meetings. She also developed a series of surveys for the administrative team to measure the team's effectiveness and faculty members' attitudes. She proposed two objectives that were : (1) to have team members reach consensus on a series of hypothetical discipline scenarios; and (2) to gather information in a self-evaluation instruments that were focused on communication skills. However in her study, Hosack found that faculty did not consistently rate the administrators' skills as significantly improved, nor did they perceive the administrators as enforcing rules fairly. It is recommended that the school develop an inservice program for teachers in

conjunction with the administrative inservice program (Hosack 1994).

Another model for socializing the assistant principal to the position is the leadership academy. The leadership academy is a collaborative effort of professional associations, state departments of education, and universities. Research results on the leadership academy appear positive. Ekholm's findings are from a five-year study of the Swedish School Leader Education Program. It is a program of leadership development for principals and vice principals. The stiudy offers support for the effectiveness of the centers (Ekholm 1992). Gold describes one such center in New York City called the Supercenter. That Center serves as an in-service training program for new and continuing assistant principals in New York City's elementary and intermediate schools. The Supercenter is based on the idea that the multiple tasks assigned to assistant principals are best learned on the job. It offers group meetings and consultations with experienced administrators (Gold 1990). Research about the leadership academy for the assistant principals shows that there are problems with cooperation between the profesisonal organization and the university. Markus and McElroy evaluated the effectiveness of fifteen National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) leadership academies across the nation. They found that two-thirds of the NASSP centers had been able to work with universities to integrate their leadership activities into the educational administration programs in the universities (Markus & McElroy 1993/1994).

Team management and shared decision making is simple enough to attract

wide attention from reformers. The concept of the assistant principal's role in team management and shared decision making is certain to be part of educational reform in the 21st Century. Changes in the views of assistant principal's skills, in particular, will surely occur. Marshall is one researcher who discusses the concept of managing with a team (Marshall 1991). In schools for the next millennium, the management team will include the assistant principal, and that in itself raises the professionalism of the assistant principal's role. Other problems to be faced are related how the assistant principal can best be prepared to rise the the challenges of this new role.

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